











# THE SPRINGTIDE OF LIFE

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*The face and the voice of a child are assurance of  
heaven and its promise for ever*

# THE SPRINGTIDE OF LIFE



POEMS OF CHILDHOOD BY  
ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE  
WITH A PREFACE BY EDMUND GOSSE



ILLUSTRATED BY ARTHUR RACKHAM

LONDON  
WILLIAM HEINEMANN

***London : William Heinemann, 1918***



## Preface

**A**S the close of his life approached, Swinburne frequently expressed his intention to extract from his various volumes those poems which were addressed to children, or were descriptive of child life, and to publish them in a separate collection. He died without having found occasion to carry out this plan, and he left no directions with regard to the way in which it ought to be done. But I have felt that there should be as little further delay as possible in carrying out his wish and design, and in preparing the present anthology I have been actuated by the sole thought of what would have commended itself to him.

I have taken no liberties with the text ; I have simply selected from the four volumes in which they mainly occur—namely, from *Poems and Ballads*, Second Series (1878), *Tristram of Lyonesse and Other Poems* (1882), *A Century of Roundels* (1883), and *Poems and Ballads*, Third Series (1889)—the pieces which are definitely concerned with infancy. I have omitted one or two in which there was a close repetition of subject or form of

address, and I have rearranged them all in some rough chronological order, beginning with the songs of birth and proceeding to those which celebrate the maturity of nine years. I supplement the whole with the impassioned cycle of poems called "A Dark Month."

One reason why Swinburne never brought out such a collection was his failure to find an artist who could interpret to his satisfaction the simplicity and freshness of his verses. We are fortunate in having secured, in Mr. Arthur Rackham, one whose delicate and romantic fancy is in sensitive harmony with Swinburne's, and who understands, no less than he did, how "Heaven lies about us in our infancy."

EDMUND GOSSE





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<i>The face and the voice of a child are assurance of heaven and its promise for ever</i>	<i>Frontispiece</i>
<i>Hush ! for the holiest thing that lives is here</i>	<i>Facing 2</i>
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## Herse

WHEN grace is given us ever to behold  
A child some sweet months old,  
Love, laying across our lips his finger, saith,  
Smiling, with bated breath,  
Hush ! for the holiest thing that lives is here,  
And heaven's own heart how near !  
How dare we, that may gaze not on the sun,  
Gaze on this verier one ?  
Heart, hold thy peace ; eyes, be cast down for  
Lips, breathe not yet its name. [shame ;  
In heaven they know what name to call it ; we,  
How should we know ? For, see !  
The adorable sweet living marvellous  
Strange light that lightens us  
Who gaze, desertless of such glorious grace,  
Full in a babe's warm face !  
All roses that the morning rears are nought,  
All stars not worth a thought,  
Set this one star against them, or suppose  
As rival this one rose.  
What price could pay with earth's whole weight  
One least flushed roseleaf's fold [of gold  
Of all this dimpling store of smiles that shine  
From each warm curve and line,



Each charm of flower-sweet flesh, to reillumine  
The dappled rose-red bloom  
Of all its dainty body, honey-sweet  
Clenched hands and curled-up feet,  
That on the roses of the dawn have trod  
As they came down from God,  
And keep the flush and colour that the sky  
Takes when the sun comes nigh,  
And keep the likeness of the smile their grace  
Evoked on God's own face  
When, seeing this work of his most heavenly mood,  
He saw that it was good ?  
For all its warm sweet body seems one smile,  
And mere men's love too vile  
To meet it, or with eyes that worship dims  
Read o'er the little limbs,  
Read all the book of all their beauties o'er,  
Rejoice, revere, adore,  
Bow down and worship each delight in turn,  
Laugh, wonder, yield, and yearn.  
But when our trembling kisses dare, yet dread,  
Even to draw nigh its head,  
And touch, and scarce with touch or breath surprise  
Its mild miraculous eyes  
Out of their viewless vision—O, what then,  
What may be said of men ?  
What speech may name a new-born child ? what word  
Earth ever spake or heard ?  
The best men's tongue that ever glory knew  
Called that a drop of dew  
Which from the breathing creature's kindly womb  
Came forth in blameless bloom.  
We have no word, as had those men most high,  
To call a baby by.  
Rose, ruby, lily, pearl of stormless seas—  
A better word than these,

*Hush ' for the holiest thing that lives is here*

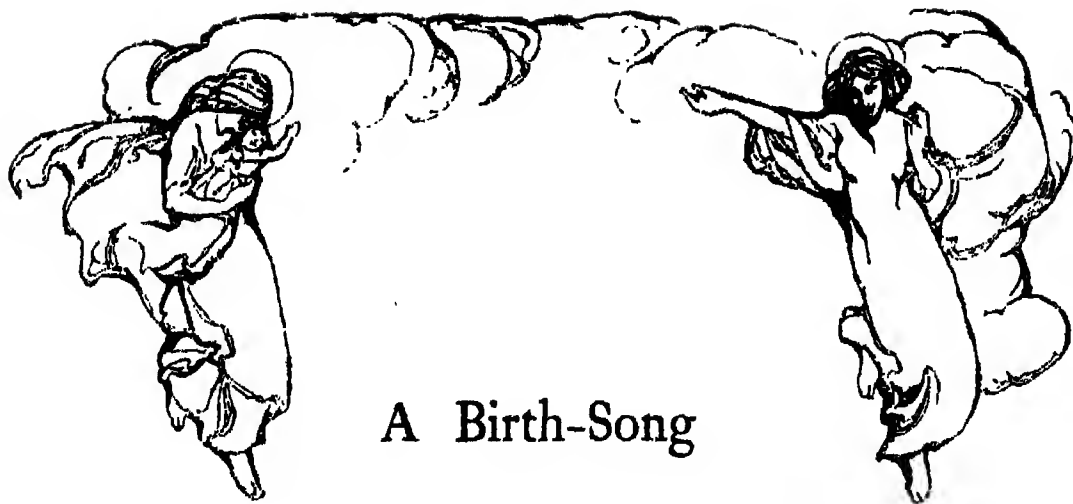






A better sign it was than flower or gem  
That love revealed to them :  
They knew that whence comes light or quickening  
Thence only this thing came, [flame,  
And only might be likened of our love  
To somewhat born above,  
Not even to sweetest things dropped else on earth,  
Only to dew's own birth.  
Nor doubt we but their sense was heavenly true,  
Babe, when we gaze on you,  
A dewdrop out of heaven whose colours are  
More bright than sun or star,  
As now, ere watching love dare fear or hope,  
Lips, hands, and eyelids ope,  
And all your life is mixed with earthly leaven.  
O child, what news from heaven ?





## A Birth-Song

OUT of the dark sweet sleep  
Where no dreams laugh or weep  
    Borne through bright gates of birth  
Into the dim sweet light  
Where day still dreams of night  
    While heaven takes form on earth.  
White rose of spirit and flesh, red lily of love,  
    What note of song have we  
    Fit for the birds and thee,  
Fair nestling couched beneath the mother-dove ?

Nay, in some more divine  
Small speechless song of thine  
    Some news too good for words,  
Heart-hushed and smiling, we  
Might hope to have of thee.  
    The youngest of God's birds,  
If thy sweet sense might mix itself with ours,  
    If ours might understand  
    The language of thy land,  
Ere thine become the tongue of mortal hours :

Ere thy lips learn too soon  
Their soft first human tune,  
    Sweet, but less sweet than now,  
And thy raised eyes to read  
Glad and good things indeed,  
    But none so sweet as thou :  
Ere thought lift up their flower-soft lids to see  
    What life and love on earth  
    Bring thee for gifts at birth,  
But none so good as thine who hast given us thee ;

Now, ere thy sense forget  
The heaven that fills it yet,  
    Now, sleeping or awake,  
If thou couldst tell, or we  
Ask and be heard of thee,  
    For love's undying sake,  
From thy dumb lips divine and bright mute speech  
    Such news might touch our ear  
    That then would burn to hear  
Too high a message now for man's to reach.

Ere the gold hair of corn  
Had withered wast thou born,  
    To make the good time glad ;  
The time that but last year  
Fell colder than a tear  
    On hearts and hopes turned sad,  
High hopes and hearts requickening in thy dawn,  
    Even theirs whose life-springs, child,  
    Filled thine with life and smiled,  
But then wept blood for half their own withdrawn.



If death and birth be one,  
And set with rise of sun,  
And truth with dreams divine,  
Some word might come with thee  
From over the still sea  
Deep hid in shade or shine,  
Crossed by the crossing sails of death and birth,  
Word of some sweet new thing  
Fit for such lips to bring,  
Some word of love, some afterthought of earth.

If love be strong as death,  
By what so natural breath  
As thine could this be said ?  
By what so lovely way  
Could love send word to say  
He lives and is not dead ?  
Such word alone were fit for only thee,  
If his and thine have met  
Where spirits rise and set,  
His whom we see not, thine whom scarce we see

His there new-born, as thou  
New-born among us now ;  
His, here so fruitful-souled,  
Now veiled and silent here,  
Now dumb as thou last year,  
A ghost of one year old :  
If lights that change their sphere in changing meet,  
Some ray might his not give  
To thine who wast to live,  
And make thy present with his past life sweet ?

Let dreams that laugh or weep,  
All glad and sad dreams, sleep ;  
Truth more than dreams is dear.  
Let thoughts that change and fly,  
Sweet thoughts and swift, go by ;  
More than all thought is here.  
More than all hope can forge or memory feign  
The life that in our eyes,  
Made out of love's life, lies,  
And flower-like fed with love for sun and rain.

Twice royal in its root  
The sweet small olive-shoot  
Here set in sacred earth ;  
Twice dowered with glorious grace  
From either heaven-born race  
First blended in its birth ;  
Fair God or Genius of so fair an hour,  
For love of either name  
Twice crowned, with love and fame,  
Guard and be gracious to the fair-named flower.



## Étude Réaliste

A BABY'S feet, like sea-shells pink,  
Might tempt. should heaven see meet,  
An angel's lips to kiss, we think,  
A baby's feet.

Like rose-hued sea-flowers toward the heat  
They stretch and spread and wink  
Their ten soft buds that part and meet.

No flower-bells that expand and shrink  
Gleam half so heavenly sweet  
As shine on life's untrodden brink  
A baby's feet.



11

A baby's hands, like rosebuds furled  
Whence yet no leaf expands,  
Ope if you touch, though close upcurled,  
A baby's hands.

Then, fast as warriors grip their brands  
When battle's bolt is hurled,  
They close, clenched hard like tightening bands.

No rosebuds yet by dawn impearled  
Match, even in loveliest lands,  
The sweetest flowers in all the world—  
A baby's hands.



iii

A baby's eyes, ere speech begin,  
Ere lips learn words or sighs,  
Bless all things bright enough to win  
A baby's eyes.

Love, while the sweet thing laughs and lies,  
And sleep flows out and in,  
Sees perfect in them Paradise.

Their glance might cast out pain and sin,  
Their speech make dumb the wise,  
By mute glad godhead felt within  
A baby's eyes.



## Babyhood

### i

A BABY shines as bright  
If winter or if May be  
On eyes that keep in sight  
A baby.

Though dark the skies or grey be,  
It fills our eyes with light,  
If midnight or midday be.

Love hails it, day and night,  
The sweetest thing that may be,  
Yet cannot praise aright  
A baby.



ii

All heaven, in every baby born,  
All absolute of earthly leaven,  
Reveals itself, though man may scorn  
All heaven.

Yet man might feel all sin forgiven,  
All grief appeased, all pain outworn,  
By this one revelation given.

Soul, now forget thy burdens borne :  
Heart, be thy joys now seven times seven :  
Love shows in light more bright than morn  
All heaven.



iii

What likeness may define, and stray not  
From truth's exactest way,  
A baby's beauty? Love can say not  
What likeness may.

The Mayflower loveliest held in May  
Of all that shine and stay not  
Laughs not in rosier disarray.

Sleek satin, swansdown, buds that play not  
As yet with winds that play,  
Would fain be matched with this, and may not  
What likeness may?



Rose, round whose bed  
Dawn's cloudlets close,  
Earth's brightest-bred  
Rose !

No song, love knows,  
May praise the head  
Your curtain shows.

Ere sleep has fled,  
The whole child glows  
One sweet live red  
Rose.





## Twins

APRIL, on whose wings  
Ride all gracious things,  
Like the star that brings  
    All things good to man,  
Ere his light, that yet  
Makes the month shine, set,  
And fair May forget  
    Whence her birth began,

Brings, as heart would choose,  
Sound of golden news,  
Bright as kindling dew  
    When the dawn begins ;  
Tidings clear as mirth,  
Sweet as air and earth  
Now that hail the birth,  
    Twice thus blest, of twins.

In the lovely land  
Where with hand in hand  
Lovers wedded stand  
    Other joys before  
Made your mixed life sweet :  
Now, as Time sees meet,  
Three glad blossoms greet  
    Two glad blossoms more.

Fed with sun and dew,  
While your joys were new,  
First arose and grew  
    One bright olive-shoot :  
Then a fair and fine  
Slip of warm-haired pine  
Felt the sweet sun shine  
    On its leaf and fruit.

And it wore for mark  
Graven on the dark  
Beauty of its bark  
    That the noblest name  
Worn in song of old  
By the king whose bold  
Hand had fast in hold  
    All the flower of fame.

Then, with southern skies  
Flattered in her eyes,  
Which, in lovelier wise  
    Yet, reflect their blue  
Brightened more, being bright  
Here with life's delight,  
And with love's live light  
    Glorified anew,

Came, as fair as came  
One who bore her name  
(She that broke as flame  
    From the swan-shell white),  
Crowned with tender hair  
Only, but more fair  
Than all queens that were  
    Themes of oldworld fight,

Of your flowers the third  
Bud, or new-fledged bird  
In your hearts' nest heard  
    Murmuring like a dove  
Bright as those that drew  
Over waves where blew  
No loud wind the blue  
    Heaven-hued car of love.

Not the glorious grace  
Even of that one face  
Potent to displace  
    All the towers of Troy  
Surely shone more clear  
Once with childlike cheer  
Than this child's face here  
    Now with living joy.

After these again  
Here in April's train  
Breaks the bloom of twain  
    Blossoms in one birth  
For a crown of May  
On the front of day  
When he takes his way  
    Over heaven and earth.

Half a heavenly thing  
Given from heaven to Spring  
By the sun her king,  
    Half a tender toy,  
Seems a child of curl  
Yet too soft to twirl ;  
Seems the flower-sweet girl  
    By the flower-bright boy.

All the kind gods' grace,  
All their love, embrace  
Ever either face,  
    Ever brood above them :  
All soft wings of hours  
Screen them as with flowers  
From all beams and showers :  
    All life's seasons love them.

When the dews of sleep  
Falling lightliest keep  
Eyes too close to peep  
    Forth and laugh off rest,  
Joy from face to feet  
Fill them, as is meet :  
Life to them be sweet  
    As their mother's breast.

When those dews are dry,  
And in day's bright eye  
Looking full they lie  
    Bright as rose and pearl,  
All returns of joy  
Pure of time's alloy  
Bless the rose-red boy,  
    Guard the rose-white girl.



## The Salt of the Earth

IF childhood were not in the world,  
But only men and women grown ;  
No baby-locks in tendrils curled,  
No baby-blossoms blown ;

Though men were stronger, women fairer,  
And nearer all delights in reach,  
And verse and music uttered rarer  
Tones of more godlike speech ;

Though the utmost life of life's best hours  
Found, as it cannot now find, words ;  
Though desert sands were sweet as flowers  
And flowers could sing like birds,

But children never heard them, never  
They felt a child's foot leap and run :  
This were a drearier star than ever  
Yet looked upon the sun.

## A Baby's Death

### i

A LITTLE soul scarce fledged for earth  
Takes wing with heaven again for goal  
Even while we hailed as fresh from birth  
A little soul.

Our thoughts ring sad as bells that toll,  
Not knowing beyond this blind world's girth  
What things are writ in heaven's full scroll.

Our fruitfulness is there but dearth,  
And all things held in time's control  
Seem there, perchance, ill dreams, not worth  
A little soul.

### ii

The little feet that never trod  
Earth, never strayed in field or street,  
What hand leads upward back to God  
The little feet ?

A rose in June's most honied heat,  
When life makes keen the kindling sod,  
Was not so soft and warm and sweet.

Their pilgrimage's period  
A few swift moons have seen complete  
Since mother's hands first clasped and shod  
The little feet.

iii

The little hands that never sought  
Earth's prizes, worthless all as sands,  
What gift has death, God's servant, brought  
The little hands ?

We ask : but love's self silent stands,  
Love, that lends eyes and wings to thought  
To search where death's dim heaven expands.

Ere this, perchance, though love know nought,  
Flowers fill them, grown in lovelier lands,  
Where hands of guiding angels caught  
The little hands.

iv

The little eyes that never knew  
Light other than of dawning skies,  
What new life now lights up anew  
The little eyes ?

Who knows but on their sleep may rise  
Such light as never heaven let through  
To lighten earth from Paradise ?

No storm, we know, may change the blue  
Soft heaven that haply death descries ;  
No tears, like these in ours, bedew  
The little eyes.



v

Was life so strange, so sad the sky,  
 So strait the wide world's range,  
 He would not stay to wonder why  
 Was life so strange ?

Was earth's fair house a joyless grange  
 Beside that house on high  
 Whence Time that bore him failed to estrange ?

That here at once his soul put by  
 All gifts of time and change,  
 And left us heavier hearts to sigh  
 " Was life so strange ? "

vi

Angel by name love called him, seeing so fair  
 The sweet small frame ;  
 Meet to be called, if ever man's child were,  
 Angel by name.

Rose-bright and warm from heaven's own heart he  
 And might not bear [came,  
 The cloud that covers earth's wan face with shame.

His little light of life was all too rare  
 And soft a flame ;  
 Heaven yearned for him till angels hailed him there  
 Angel by name.

The song that smiled upon his birthday here  
Weeps on the grave that holds him undefiled  
Whose loss makes bitterer than a soundless tear  
The song that smiled.

His name crowned once the mightiest ever styled  
Sovereign of arts, and angel : fate and fear  
Knew then their master, and were reconciled.

But we saw born beneath some tenderer sphere  
Michael, an angel and a little child,  
Whose loss bows down to weep upon his bier  
The song that smiled.

## A Baby's Epitaph

**APRIL**, made me : winter laid me here away asleep.  
Bright as Maytime was my daytime ; night is soft and  
deep :  
Though the morrow bring forth sorrow, well are ye that  
weep.

Ye that held me dear beheld me not a twelvemonth long :  
All the while ye saw me smile, ye knew not whence the  
  song  
Came that made me smile, and laid me here, and wrought  
  you wrong.

Angels, calling from your brawling world one undefiled,  
Homeward bade me, and forbade me here to rest beguiled :  
Here I sleep not : pass, and weep not here upon your  
child.

## One of Twain

### i

ONE of twain, twin-born with flowers that waken,  
Now hath passed from sense of sun and rain :  
Wind from off the flower-crowned branch hath shaken  
One of twain.

One twin flower must pass, and one remain :  
One, the word said soothly, shall be taken,  
And another left : can death refrain ?

Two years since was love's light song mistaken,  
Blessing then both blossoms, half in vain ?  
Night outspeeding light hath overtaken  
One of twain.

### ii

Night and light ? O thou of heart unwary,  
Love, what knowest thou here at all aright,  
Lured, abused, misled as men by fairy  
Night and light ?

Haply, where thine eyes behold but night,  
Soft as o'er her babe the smile of Mary  
Light breaks flowerwise into new-born sight.

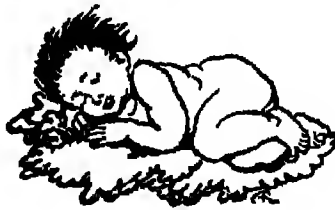
What though night of light to thee be chary ?  
What though stars of hope like flowers take flight ?  
Seest thou all things here, where all see vary  
Night and light ?

## Three Weeks Old

THREE weeks since there was no such rose in being ;  
Now may eyes made dim with deep delight  
See how fair it is, laugh with love, and seeing  
Praise the chance that bids us bless the sight.

Three weeks old, and a very rose of roses,  
Bright and sweet as love is sweet and bright.  
Heaven and earth, till a man's life wanes and closes,  
Show not life or love a lovelier sight.

Three weeks past have renewed the rose-bright creature  
Day by day with life, and night by night.  
Love, though fain of its every faultless feature,  
Finds not words to match the silent sight.



# A Clasp of Hands

## i

SOFT, small, and sweet' as sunniest flowers  
That bask in heavenly heat  
When bud by bud breaks, breathes, and cowers,  
Soft, small, and sweet,

A babe's hands open as to greet  
The tender touch of ours  
And mock with motion faint and fleet

The minutes of the new strange hours  
That earth, not heaven, must mete ;  
Buds fragrant still from heaven's own bowers,  
Soft, small, and sweet.

## ii

A velvet vice with springs of steel  
That fasten in a trice  
And clench the fingers fast that feel  
A velvet vice—

What man would risk the danger twice,  
Nor quake from head to heel ?  
Whom would not one such test suffice ?

Well may we tremble as we kneel  
In sight of Paradise,  
If both a babe's closed fists conceal  
A velvet vice.

Two flower-soft fists of conquering clutch,  
 Two creased and dimpled wrists,  
 That match, if mottled overmuch,  
 Two flower-soft fists—

What heart of man dare hold the lists  
 Against such odds and such  
 Sweet vantage as no strength resists ?\*

Our strength is all a broken crutch,  
 Our eyes are dim with mists,  
 Our hearts are prisoners as we touch  
 Two flower-soft fists.





## Cradle Songs To a Tune of Blake's

i

BABY, baby bright,  
Sleep can steal from sight  
Little of your light :

Soft as fire in dew,  
Still the life in you  
Lights your slumber through.

Four white eyelids keep  
Fast the seal of sleep  
Deep as love is deep :

Yet, though closed it lies,  
Love behind them spies  
Heaven in two blue eyes.





ii

Baby, baby dear,  
Earth and heaven are near  
Now, for heaven is here.

Heaven is every place  
Where your flower-sweet face  
Fills our eyes with grace.

Till your own eyes deign  
Earth a glance again,  
Earth and heaven are twain.

Now your sleep is done,  
Shine, and show the sun  
Earth and heaven are one.



iii

Baby, baby sweet,  
Love's own lips are meet  
Scarce to kiss your feet.

Hardly love's own ear,  
When your laugh crows clear,  
Quite deserves to hear.

Hardly love's own wile,  
Though it please awhile,  
Quite deserves your smile.

Baby full of grace,  
Bless us yet a space :  
Sleep will come apace.



iv

Baby, baby true,  
Man, whate'er he do,  
May deceive not you.

Smiles whose love is guile,  
Worn a flattering while,  
Win from you no smile.

One, the smile alone  
Out of love's heart grown,  
Ever wins your own.

Man, a dunce uncouth,  
Errs in age and youth :  
Babies know the truth.



V

Baby, baby fair,  
Love is fain to dare  
Bless your haughtiest air.

Baby blithe and bland,  
Reach but forth a hand  
None may dare withstand ;

Love, though wellnigh cowed,  
Yet would praise aloud  
Pride so sweetly proud.

No ! the fitting word  
Even from breeze or bird  
Never yet was heard.



VI

Baby, baby kind,  
Though no word we find,  
Bear us yet in mind.

Half a little hour,  
Baby bright in bower,  
Keep this thought aflower-

Love it is, I see,  
Here with heart and knee  
Bows and worships me.

What can baby do,  
Then, for love so true?—  
Let it worship you.



vii

Baby, baby wise,  
Love's divine surmise  
Lights your constant eyes.

Day and night and day  
One mute word would they,  
As the soul saith, say.

Trouble comes and goes ;  
Wonder ebbs and flows ;  
Love remains and glows.

As the fledgeling dove  
Feels the breast above,  
So your heart feels love.



## In a Garden

BABY, see the flowers !  
—Baby sees  
Fairer things than these,  
Fairer though they be than dreams of ours.

Baby, hear the birds !  
—Baby knows  
Better songs than those,  
Sweeter though they sound than sweetest words.

Baby, see the moon !  
—Baby's eyes  
Laugh to watch it rise,  
Answering light with love and night with noon.

Baby, hear the sea !  
—Baby's face  
Takes a graver grace,  
Touched with wonder what the sound may be.

Baby, see the star !  
—Baby's hand  
Opens, warm and bland,  
Calm in claim of all things fair that are.

Baby, hear the bells !  
—Baby's head  
Bows, as ripe for bed,  
Now the flowers curl round and close their cells.

Baby, flower of light,  
Sleep, and see  
Brighter dreams than we,  
Till good day shall smile away good night.







## A Rhyme

BABE, if rhyme be none  
For that sweet small word  
Babe, the sweetest one  
Ever heard,

Right it is and meet  
Rhyme should keep not true  
Time with such a sweet  
Thing as you.

Meet it is that rhyme  
Should not gain such grace :  
What is April's prime  
To your face ?

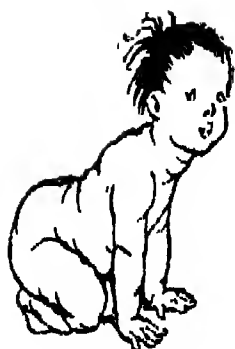
What to yours is May's  
Rosiest smile ? what sound  
Like your laughter sways  
All hearts round ?

None can tell in metre  
Fit for ears on earth  
What sweet star grew sweeter  
At your birth.

Wisdom doubts what may be :  
Hope, with smile sublime,  
Trusts : but neither, baby,  
Knows the rhyme.

Wisdom lies down lonely :  
Hope keeps watch from far ;  
None but one seer only  
Sees the star.

Love alone, with yearning  
Heart for astrolabe,  
Takes the star's height, burning  
O'er the babe.



## Baby-Bird

BABY-BIRD, baby-bird,  
Ne'er a song on earth  
May be heard, may be heard.  
Rich as yours in mirth.

All your flickering fingers,  
All your twinkling toes,  
Play like light that lingers  
Till the clear song close.

Baby-bird, baby-bird,  
Your grave majestic eyes  
Like a bird's warbled words  
Speak, and sorrow dies.

Sorrow dies for love's sake,  
Love grows one with mirth,  
Even for one white dove's sake,  
Born a babe on earth.

Baby-bird, baby-bird,  
Chirping loud and long,  
Other birds hush their words,  
Hearkening toward your song.

Sweet as spring though it ring,  
Full of love's own lures,  
Weak and wrong sounds their song,  
Singing after yours.

Baby-bird, baby-bird,  
The happy heart that hears  
Seems to win back within  
Heaven, and cast out fears.

Earth and sun seem as one  
Sweet light and one sweet word  
Known of none here but one,  
Known of one sweet bird.



# First Footsteps

A LITTLE way, more soft and sweet  
Than fields aflower with May,  
A babe's feet, venturing, scarce complete  
A little way.

Eyes full of dawning day  
Look up for mother's eyes to meet,  
Too blithe for song to say.

Glad as the golden spring to greet  
Its first live leaflet's play,  
Love, laughing, leads the little feet  
A little way.



*Love, laughing, leads the little feet a little way*









## Child's Song

WHAT is gold worth, say,  
Worth for work or play,  
Worth to keep or pay,  
Hide or throw away,  
    Hope about or fear ?  
What is love worth, pray ?  
    Worth a tear ?

Golden on the mould  
Lie the dead leaves rolled  
Of the wet woods old,  
Yellow leaves and cold,  
    Woods without a dove .  
Gold is worth but gold ;  
    Love's worth love.





## Six Years Old

To H. W. M.

BETWEEN the springs of six and seven,  
Two fresh years' fountains, clear  
Of all but golden sand for leaven,  
Child, midway passing here,  
As earth for love's sake dares bless heaven,  
So dare I bless you, dear.

Between two bright well-heads, that brighten  
With every breath that blows  
Too loud to lull, too low to frighten,  
But fain to rock, the rose,  
Your feet stand fast, your lit smiles lighten,  
That might rear flowers from snows.

You came when winds unleashed were snarling  
Behind the frost-bound hours,  
A snow-bird sturdier than the starling,  
A storm-bird fledged for showers,  
That spring might smile to find you, darling,  
First born of all the flowers.

Could love make worthy things of worthless,  
My song were worth an ear :  
Its note should make the days most mirthless  
The merriest of the year,  
And wake to birth all buds yet birthless  
To keep your birthday, dear.

But where your birthday brightens heaven  
No need has earth, God knows,  
Of light or warmth to melt or leaven  
The frost or fog that glows  
With sevenfold heavenly lights of seven  
Sweet springs that cleave the snows.

Could love make worthy music of you,  
And match my Master's powers,  
Had even my love less heart to love you,  
A better song were ours ;  
With all the rhymes like stars above you,  
And all the words like flowers.



## Comparisons

CHILD, when they say that others  
Have been or are like you,  
Babes fit to be your brothers,  
Sweet human drops of dew,  
Bright fruit of mortal mothers,  
What should one say or do ?

We know the thought is treason,  
We feel the dream absurd ;  
A claim rebuked of reason,  
That withers at a word :  
For never shone the season  
That bore so blithe a bird.

Some smiles may seem as merry,  
Some glances gleam as wise,  
From lips as like a cherry  
And scarce less gracious eyes ;  
Eyes browner than a berry,  
Lips red as morning's rise.

But never yet rang laughter  
So sweet in gladdened ears  
Through wall and floor and rafter  
As all this household hears  
And rings response thereafter  
Till cloudiest weather clears.

When those your chosen of all men,  
Whose honey never cloys,  
Two lights whose smiles enthrall men,  
Were called at your age boys,  
Those mighty men, while small men,  
Could make no merrier noise.

Our Shakespeare, surely, daffed not  
More lightly pain aside  
From radiant lips that quaffed not  
Of forethought's tragic tide :  
Our Dickens, doubtless, laughed not  
More loud with life's first pride.

The dawn were not more cheerless  
With neither light nor dew  
Than we without the fearless  
Clear laugh that thrills us through :  
If ever child stood peerless,  
Love knows that child is you.

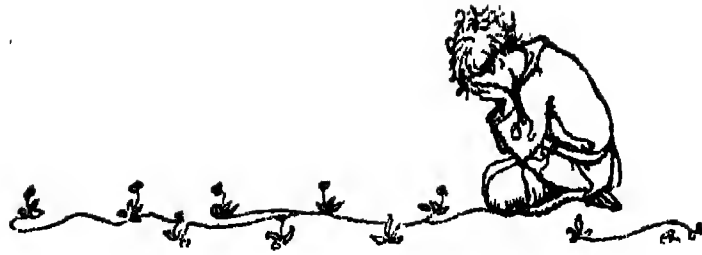




## What is Death?

LOOKING on a page where stood  
Graven of old on old-world wood  
Death, and by the grave's edge grim,  
Pale, the young man facing him,  
Asked my well-beloved of me  
Once what strange thing this might be,  
Gaunt and great of limb.

Death, I told him : and, surprise  
Deepening more his wildwood eyes  
(Like some sweet fleet thing's whose breath  
Speaks all spring though nought it saith),  
Up he turned his rosebright face  
Glorious with its seven years' grace,  
Asking—What is death?



## A Child's Pity

NO sweeter thing than children's ways and wiles,  
Surely, we say, can gladden eyes and ears :  
Yet sometime sweeter than their words or smiles  
Are even their tears.

To one for once a piteous tale was read,  
How, when the murderous mother crocodile  
Was slain, her fierce brood famished, and lay dead,  
Starved, by the Nile.

In vast green reed-beds on the vast grey slime  
Those monsters motherless and helpless lay,  
Perishing only for the parent's crime  
Whose seed were they.

Hours after, toward the dusk, our blithe small bird  
Of Paradise, who has our hearts in keeping,  
Was heard or seen, but hardly seen or heard,  
For pity weeping.

He was so sorry, sitting still apart,  
For the poor little crocodiles, he said.  
Six years had given him, for an angel's heart,  
A child's instead.

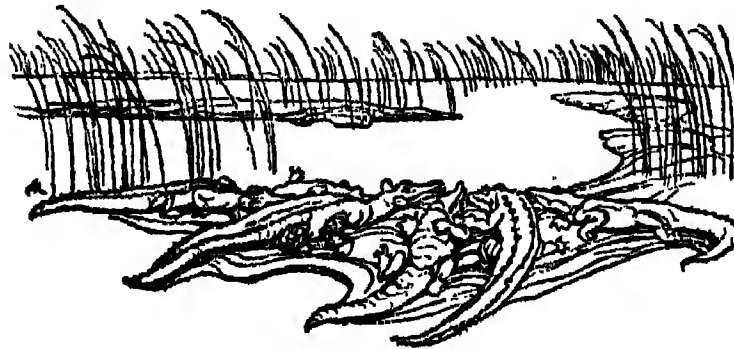


Feigned tears the false beasts shed for murderous ends,  
We know from travellers' tales of crocodiles :  
But these tears wept upon them of my friend's \*  
Outshine his smiles.

What heavenliest angels of what heavenly city  
Could match the heavenly heart in children here ?  
The heart that hallowing all things with its pity  
Casts out all fear ?

So lovely, so divine, so dear their laughter  
Seems to us, we know not what could be more dear :  
But lovelier yet we see the sign thereafter  
Of such a tear.

With sense of love half laughing and half weeping  
We met your tears, our small sweet-spirited friend :  
Let your love have us in its heavenly keeping  
To life's last end.





## A Child's Laughter

ALL the bells of heaven may ring,  
All the birds of heaven may sing,  
All the wells on earth may spring,  
All the winds on earth may bring  
    All sweet sounds together ;  
Sweeter far than all things heard,  
Hand of harper, tone of bird,  
Sound of woods at sundawn stirred,  
Welling water's winsome word,  
    Wind in warm wan weather,

One thing yet there is, that none  
Hearing ere its chime be done  
Knows not well the sweetest one  
Heard of man beneath the sun,  
    Hoped in heaven hereafter ;  
Soft and strong and loud and light,  
Very sound of very light  
Heard from morning's rosiest height,  
When the soul of all delight  
    Fills a child's clear laughter.

Golden bells of welcome rolled  
Never forth such notes, nor told  
Hours so blithe in tones so bold  
As the radiant mouth of gold  
    Here that rings forth heaven.  
If the golden-crested wren  
Were a nightingale—why, then,  
Something seen and heard of men  
Might be half as sweet as when  
    Laughs a child of seven.

## A Child's Thanks

HOW low soe'er men rank us,  
How high soe'er we win,  
The children far above us  
Dwell, and they deign to love us,  
With lovelier love than ours,  
And smiles more sweet than flowers ;  
As though the sun should thank us  
For letting light come in.

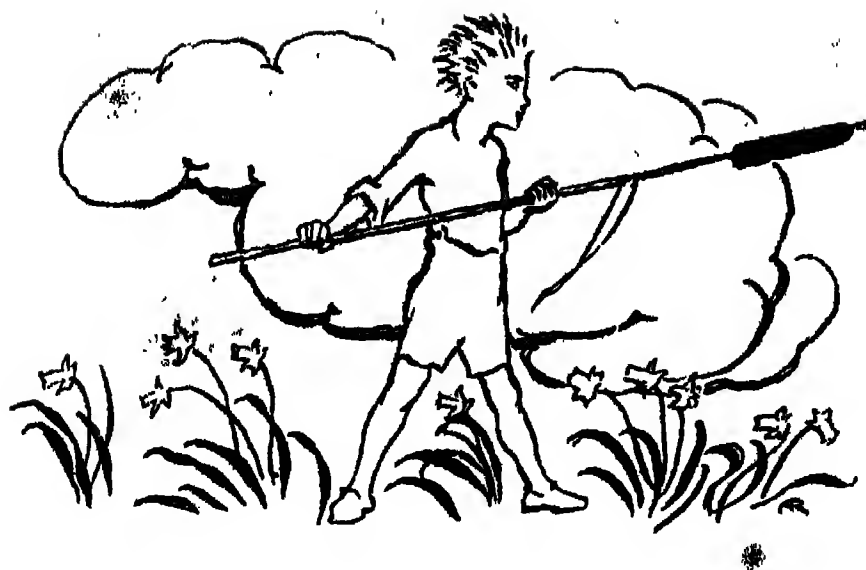
With too divine complaisance,  
Whose grace misleads them thus,  
Being gods, in heavenly blindness  
They call our worship kindness,  
Our pebble-gift a gem :  
They think us good to them,  
Whose glance, whose breath, whose presence,  
Are gifts too good for us.

The poet high and hoary  
Of meres that mountains bind  
Felt his great heart more often  
Yearn, and its proud strength soften  
From stern to tenderer mood,  
At thought of gratitude  
Shown than of song or story  
He heard of hearts unkind.

But with what words for token  
And what adoring tears  
Of reverence risen to passion,  
In what glad prostrate fashion  
Of spirit and soul subdued,  
May man show gratitude  
For thanks of children spoken  
That hover in his ears ?

The angels laugh, your brothers,  
Child, hearing you thank me,  
With eyes whence night grows sunny,  
And touch of lips like honey,  
And words like honey-dew :  
But how shall I thank you ?  
For gifts above all others  
What guerdon-gift may be ?

What wealth of words caressing,  
What choice of songs found best,  
Would seem not as derision,  
Found vain beside the vision  
And glory from above  
Shown in a child's heart's love ?  
His part in life is blessing ;  
Ours, only to be blest.



## A Child's Battles

*πύξ ἀρετὰν εὐρών.*—PINDAR

PRAISE of the knights of old  
May sleep : their tale is told,  
And no man cares :  
The praise which fires our lips is  
A knight's whose fame eclipses  
All of theirs.

The ruddiest light in heaven  
Blazed as his birth-star seven  
Long years ago :  
All glory crown that old year  
Which brought our stout small soldier  
With the snow !

Each baby born has one  
Star, for his friends a sun,  
The first of stars :  
And we, the more we scan it,  
The more grow sure your planet,  
Child, was Mars.

For each one flower, perchance  
Blooms as his cognizance :  
    The snowdrop chill,  
The violet unbeholden,  
For some : for you the golden  
    Daffodil.

Erect, a fighting flower,  
It breasts the breeziest hour  
    That ever blew,  
And bent or broke things brittle  
Or frail, unlike a little  
    Knight like you.

Its flower is firm and fresh  
And stout like sturdiest flesh  
    Of children : all  
The strenuous blast that parches  
Spring hurts it not till March is  
    Near his fall.

If winds that prate and fret  
Remark, rebuke, regret,  
    Lament, or blame  
The brave plant's martial passion  
It keeps its own free fashion  
    All the same.

We that would fain seem wise  
Assume grave mouths and eyes  
    Whose looks reprove  
Too much delight in battle :  
But your great heart our prattle  
    Cannot move.

We say, small children should  
Be placid, mildly good  
And blandly meek :  
Whereat the broad smile rushes  
Full on your lips, and flushes  
All your cheek.

If all the stars that are  
Laughed out, and every star  
Could here be heard,  
Such peals of golden laughter  
We should not hear, as after  
Such a word.

For all the storm saith, still,  
Stout stands the daffodil :  
For all we say,  
Howe'er he look demurely,  
Our martialist will surely  
Have his way.

We may not bind with bands  
Those large and liberal hands,  
Nor stay from fight,  
Nor hold them back from giving  
No lean mean laws of living  
Bind a knight.

And always here of old  
Such gentle hearts and bold  
Our land has bred :  
How durst her eye rest else on  
The glory shed from Nelson  
Quick and dead ?



Shame were it, if but one  
Such once were born her son,  
That one to have borne,  
And brought him ne'er a brother :  
His praise should bring his mother  
Shame and scorn.

A child high-souled as he  
Whose manhood shook the sea  
Smiles haply here :  
His face, where love lies basking,  
With bright shut mouth seems asking,  
What is fear ?

The sunshine-coloured fists  
Beyond his dimpling wrists  
Were never closed  
For saving or for sparing—  
For only deeds of daring  
Predisposed.

Unclenched, the gracious hands  
Let slip their gifts like sands  
Made rich with ore  
That tongues of beggars ravish  
From small stout hands so lavish  
Of their store.

Sweet hardy kindly hands  
Like these were his that stands  
With heel on gorge  
Seen trampling down the dragon  
On sign or flask or flagon,  
Sweet Saint George.

Some tournament, perchance,  
Of hands that couch no lance,  
Might mark this spot  
Your lists, if here some pleasant  
Small Guenevere were present,  
Launcelot.

My brave bright flower, you need  
No foolish song, nor heed  
It more than spring  
The sighs of winter stricken  
Dead when your haunts requicken  
Here, my king.

Yet O, how hardly may  
The wheels of singing stay  
That whirl along  
Bright paths whence echo raises  
The phantom of your praises,  
Child, my song !

Beyond all other things  
That give my words fleet wings,  
Fleet wings and strong,  
You set their jesses ringing  
Till hardly can I, singing,  
Stint my song.

But all things better, friend,  
And worse must find an end :  
And, right or wrong,  
'Tis time, lest rhyme should baffle,  
I doubt, to put a snaffle  
On my song.

And never may your ear  
Aught harsher hear or fear,  
Nor wolfish night  
Nor dog-toothed winter snarling  
Behind your steps, my darling  
My delight !

For all the gifts you give  
Me, dear, each day you live,  
Of thanks above  
All thanks that could be spoken  
Take not my song in token,  
Take my love.



.

*A Child's Future*









## A Child's Future

WHAT will it please you, my darling, hereafter to be ?  
Fame upon land will you look for, or glory by sea ?  
Gallant your life will be always, and all of it free.

Free as the wind when the heart of the twilight is stirred  
Eastward, and sounds from the springs of the sunrise  
are heard :  
Free—and we know not another as infinite word.

Darkness or twilight or sunlight may compass us round,  
Hate may arise up against us, or hope may confound ;  
Love may forsake us ; yet may not the spirit be bound.

Free in oppression of grief as in ardour of joy  
Still may the soul be, and each to her strength as a toy :  
Free in the glance of the man as the smile of the boy.



Freedom alone is the salt and the spirit that gives  
Life, and without her is nothing that verily lives :  
Death cannot slay her : she laughs upon death and forgives.

Brightest and hardiest of roses anear and afar  
Glitters the blithe little face of you, round as a star :  
Liberty bless you and keep you to be as you are.

England and liberty bless you and keep you to be  
Worthy the name of their child and the sight of their sea :  
Fear not at all ; for a slave, if he fears not, is free.



## Seven Years Old

i

SEVEN white roses on one tree,  
Seven white loaves of blameless leaven,  
Seven white sails on one soft sea,  
Seven white swans on one lake's lee,  
Seven white flowerlike stars in heaven,  
All are types unmeet to be  
For a birthday's crown of seven.

ii

Not the radiance of the roses,  
Not the blessing of the bread,  
Not the breeze that ere day grows is  
Fresh for sails and swans, and closes  
Wings above the sun's grave spread,  
When the starshine on the snows is  
Sweet as sleep on sorrow shed,

Nothing sweetest, nothing best,  
 Holds so good and sweet a treasure  
 As the love wherewith once blest  
 Joy grows holy, grief takes rest,  
 Life, half tired with hours to measure,  
 Fills his eyes and lips and breast  
 With most light and breath of pleasure ;\*

## iv

As the rapture unpolluted,  
 As the passion undefiled,  
 By whose force all pains heart-rooted  
 Are transfigured and transmuted,  
 Recompensed and reconciled,  
 Through the imperial, undisputed,  
 Present godhead of a child.

## v

Brown bright eyes and fair bright head  
 Worth a worthier crown than this is  
 Worth a worthier song instead,  
 Sweet grave wise round mouth, full fed  
 With the joy of love, whose bliss is  
 More than mortal wine and bread,  
 Lips whose words are sweet as kisses,

vi

Little hands so glad of giving,  
    Little heart so glad of love,  
Little soul so glad of living,  
While the strong swift hours are weaving  
    Light with darkness woven above,  
Time for mirth and time for grieving,  
    Plume of raven and plume of dove,

vii

I can give you but a word  
    Warm with love therein for leaven,  
But a song that falls unheard  
Yet on ears of sense unstirred  
    Yet by song so far from heaven,  
Whence you came the brightest bird,  
    Seven years since, of seven times seven.

## Eight Years Old

SUN, whom the faltering snow-cloud fears,  
Rise, let the time of year be May,  
Speak now the word that April hears,  
Let March have all his royal way ;  
Bid all spring raise in winter's ears \*  
All tunes her children hear or play,  
Because the crown of eight glad years  
On one bright head is set to-day.

ii \*

What matters cloud or sun to-day  
To him who wears the wreath of years  
So many, and all like flowers at play  
With wind and sunshine, while his ears  
Hear only song on every way ?  
More sweet than spring triumphant hears  
Ring through the revel-rout of May  
Are these, the notes that winter fears.

iii

Strong-hearted winter knows and fears  
The music made of love at play,  
Or haply loves the tune he hears  
From hearts fulfilled with flowering May,

Whose molten music thaws his ears  
Late frozen, deaf but yesterday  
To sounds of dying and dawning years,  
Now quickened on his deathward way.

iv

For deathward now lies winter's way  
Down the green vestibule of years  
That each year brightens day by day  
With flower and shower till hope scarce fears  
And fear grows wholly hope of May.  
But we—the music in our ears  
Made of love's pulses as they play  
The heart alone that makes it hears.

v

The heart it is that plays and hears  
High salutation of to-day.  
Tongue falters, hand shrinks back, song fears  
Its own unworthiness to play  
Fit music for those eight sweet years,  
Or sing their blithe accomplished way.  
No song quite worth a young child's ears  
Broke ever even from birds in May.

vi

There beats not in the heart of May,  
When summer hopes and springtide fears,  
There falls not from the height of day,  
When sunlight speaks and silence hears,

So sweet a psalm as children play  
And sing, each hour of all their years,  
Each moment of their lovely way,  
And know not how it thrills our ears.

vii

Ah child, what are we, that our ears  
Should hear you singing on your way,  
Should have this happiness? The years  
Whose hurrying wings about us play  
Are not like yours, whose flower-time fears  
Nought worse than sunlit showers in May,  
Being sinless as the spring, that hears  
Her own heart praise her every day.

viii

Yet we too triumph in the day  
That bare, to entrance our eyes and ears,  
To lighten daylight, and to play  
Such notes as darkness knows and fears,  
The child whose face illumines our way,  
Whose voice lifts up the heart that hears,  
Whose hand is as the hand of May  
To bring us flowers from eight full years.





## Olive

i

WHO may praise her ?  
Eyes where midnight shames the sun,  
Hair of night and sunshine spun,  
Woven of dawn's or twilight's loom,  
Radiant darkness, lustrous gloom,  
Godlike childhood's flowerlike bloom,  
None may praise aright, nor sing  
Half the grace wherewith like spring  
Love arrays her.



ii

Love untold

Sings in silence, speaks in light  
 Shed from each fair feature, bright  
 Still from heaven, whence toward us, now  
 Nine years since, she deigned to bow  
 Down the brightness of her brow,  
 Deigned to pass through mortal birth ;  
 Reverence calls her, here on earth,  
 Nine years old.

iii

Love's deep duty,

Even when love transfigured grows  
 Worship, all too surely knows  
 How, though love may cast out fear,  
 Yet the debt divine and dear  
 Due to childhood's godhead here  
 May by love of man be paid  
 Never ; never song be made  
 Worth its beauty.

iv

Nought is all

Sung or said or dreamed or thought  
 Ever, set beside it ; nought  
 All the love that man may give—  
 Love whose prayer should be, " Forgive ! "  
 Heaven, we see, on earth may live ;  
 Earth can thank not heaven, we know,  
 Save with songs that ebb and flow,  
 Rise and fall.

No man living,  
No man dead, save haply one  
Now gone homeward past the sun,  
Ever found such grace as might  
Tune his tongue to praise aright  
Children, flowers of love and light,  
Whom our praise dispraises : we  
Sing, in sooth, but not as he  
Sang thanksgiving.

VI

Hope that smiled,  
Seeing her new-born beauty, made  
Out of heaven's own light and shade.  
Smiled not half so sweetly : love,  
Seeing the sun, afar above,  
Warm the nest that rears the dove,  
Sees, more bright than moon or sun,  
All the heaven of heavens in one  
Little child.

vii

Who may sing her ?  
Wings of angels when they stir  
Make no music worthy her :  
Sweeter sound her shy soft words  
Here than songs of God's own birds  
Whom the fire of rapture girds  
Round with light from love's face lit :  
Hands of angels find no fit  
Gifts to bring her.

## Babes at birth

Wear as raiment round them cast,  
 Keep as witness toward their past,  
 Tokens left of heaven ; and each,  
 Ere its lips learn mortal speech,  
 Ere sweet heaven pass on pass reach,  
 Bears in undiverted eyes  
 Proof of unforgotten skies  
 Here on earth.

## ix

## Quenched as embers

Quenched with flakes of rain or snow  
 Till the last faint flame burns low,  
 All those lustrous memories lie  
 Dead with babyhood gone by :  
 Yet in her they dare not die :  
 Others, fair as heaven is, yet,  
 Now they share not heaven, forget :  
 She remembers.





## Nine Years Old

i

LORD of light, whose shrine no hands destroy,  
God of song, whose hymn no tongue refuses,  
Now, though spring far hence be cold and coy,  
Bid the golden mouths of all the Muses  
Ring forth gold of strains without alloy,  
Till the ninefold rapture that suffuses  
Heaven with song bid earth exult for joy,  
Since the child whose head this dawn bedews is  
Sweet as once thy violet-cradled boy.

ii

Even as he lay lapped about with flowers,  
 Lies the life now nine years old before us  
 Lapped about with love in all its hours ;  
     Hailed of many loves that chant in chorus  
 Loud or low from lush or leafless bowers,  
     Some from hearts exultant born sonorous,  
 Some scarce louder-voiced than soft-tongued showers  
     Two months hence, when spring's light wings poised  
 High shall hover, and her heart be ours.      [o'er us

iii

Even as he, though man-forsaken, smiled  
     On the soft kind snakes divinely bidden  
 There to feed him in the green mid wild  
     Full with hurtless honey, till the hidden  
 Birth should prosper, finding fate more mild,  
     So full-fed with pleasures unforbidden,  
 So by love's lures blamelessly beguiled,  
     Laughs the nursling of our hearts unhidden  
 Yet by change that mars not yet the child.

iv

Ah, not yet ! Thou, lord of night and day,  
     Time, sweet father of such blameless pleasure,  
 Time, false friend who tak'st thy gifts away,  
     Spare us yet some scantlings of the treasure,  
 Leave us yet some rapture of delay,  
     Yet some bliss of blind and fearless leisure  
 Unprophetic of delight's decay,  
     Yet some nights and days wherein to measure  
 All the joys that bless us while they may.

## v

Not the waste Arcadian woodland, wet  
 Still with dawn and vocal with Alpheus,  
 Reared a nursling worthier love's regret,  
 Lord, than this, whose eyes beholden free us  
 Straight from bonds the soul would fain forget,  
 Fain cast off, that night and day might see us  
 Clear once more of life's vain fume and fret :  
 Leave us, then, whate'er thy doom decree us,  
 Yet some days wherein to love him yet.

## vi

Yet some days wherein the child is ours,  
 Ours, not thine, O lord whose hand is o'er us  
 Always, as the sky with suns and showers  
 Dense and radiant, soundless or sonorous ;  
 Yet some days for love's sake, ere the bowers  
 Fade wherein his fair first years kept chorus  
 Night and day with Graces robed like hours,  
 Ere this worshipped childhood wane before us,  
 Change, and bring forth fruit—but no more flowers

## vii

Love we may the thing that is to be,  
 Love we must : but how forego this olden  
 Joy, this flower of childish love, that we  
 Held more dear than aught of Time is holden—  
 Time, whose laugh is like as Death's to see—  
 Time, who heeds not aught of all beholden,  
 Heard, or touched in passing—flower or tree,  
 Tares or grain of leaden days or golden—  
 More than wind has heed of ships at sea ?

viii

First the babe, a very rose of joy,  
Sweet as hope's first note of jubilation,  
Passes : then must growth and change destroy  
Next the child, and mar the consecration  
Hallowing yet, ere thought or sense annoy,  
Childhood's yet half heavenlike habitation,  
Bright as truth and frailer than a toy ;  
Whence its guest with eager gratulation  
Springs, and life grows larger round the boy.

ix

Yet, ere sunrise wholly cease to shine,  
Ere change come to chide our hearts, and scatter  
Memories marked for love's sake with a sign,  
Let the light of dawn beholden flatter  
Yet some while our eyes that feed on thine,  
Child, with love that change nor time can shatter,  
Love, whose silent song says more than mine  
Now, though charged with elder loves and latter  
Here it hails a lord whose years are nine.

## After a Reading

FOR the seven times seventh time love would renew the  
delight without end or alloy  
That it takes in the praise as it takes in the presence of  
eyes that fulfil it with joy ;  
But how shall it praise them and rest unrebuked by the  
presence and pride of the boy ?

Praise meet for a child is unmeet for an elder whose  
winters and springs are nine :  
What song may have strength in its wings to expand  
them, or light in its eyes to shine,  
That shall seem not as weakness and darkness if matched  
with the theme I would fain make mine ?

The round little flower of a face that exults in the sun-  
shine of shadowless days  
Defies the delight it enkindles to sing of it aught not  
unfit for the praise  
Of the sweetest of all things that eyes may rejoice in and  
tremble with love as they gaze.

Such tricks and such meanings abound on the lips and  
the brows that are brighter than light,  
The demure little chin, the sedate little nose, and the  
forehead of sun-stained white,  
That love overflows into laughter and laughter subsides  
into love at the sight.



Each limb and each feature has action in tune with the  
 meaning that smiles as it speaks  
 From the fervour of eyes and the fluttering of hands in a  
 foretaste of fancies and freaks,  
 When the thought of them deepens the dimples that  
 laugh in the corners and curves of his cheeks.

As a bird when the music within her is yet too intense to  
be spoken in song,  
That pauses a little for pleasure to feel how the notes  
from withinwards throng,  
So pauses the laugh at his lips for a little, and waxes  
within more strong.

As the music elate and triumphal that bids all things of  
the dawn bear part  
With the tune that prevails when her passion has risen  
into rapture of passionate art,  
So lightens the laughter made perfect that leaps from its  
nest in the heaven of his heart.

Deep, grave and sedate is the gaze of expectant intensity  
bent for awhile  
And absorbed on its aim as the tale that enthralls him  
uncovers the web of its wile,  
Till the goal of attention is touched, and expectancy  
kisses delight in a smile.

And it seems to us here that in Paradise hardly the spirit  
of Lamb or of Blake  
May hear or behold aught sweeter than lightens and rings  
when his bright thoughts break  
In laughter that well might lure them to look, and to  
smile as of old for his sake.

O singers that best loved children; and best for their  
sakes are beloved of us here,  
In the world of your life everlasting, where love has no  
thorn and desire has no fear,  
All else may be sweeter than aught is on earth, nought  
dearer than these are dear.



## Maytime in Midwinter

A NEW year gleams on us, tearful  
And troubled and smiling dim  
As the smile on a lip still fearful,  
As glances of eyes that swim :  
But the bird of my heart makes cheerful  
The days that are bright for him.

Child, how may a man's love merit  
The grace you shed as you stand,  
The gift that is yours to inherit ?  
Through you are the bleak days bland ;  
Your voice is a light to my spirit ;  
You bring the sun in your hand.

The year's wing shows not a feather  
As yet of the plumes to be ;  
Yet here in the shrill grey weather  
The spring's self stands at my knee,  
And laughs as we commune together,  
And lightens the world we see.

The rains are as dews for the christening  
Of dawns that the nights benumb :  
The spring's voice answers me listening  
For speech of a child to come,  
While promise of music is glistening  
On lips that delight keeps dumb.

The mists and the storms receding  
At sight of you smile and die :  
Your eyes held wide on me reading  
Shed summer across the sky :  
Your heart shines clear for me, heeding  
No more of the world than I.

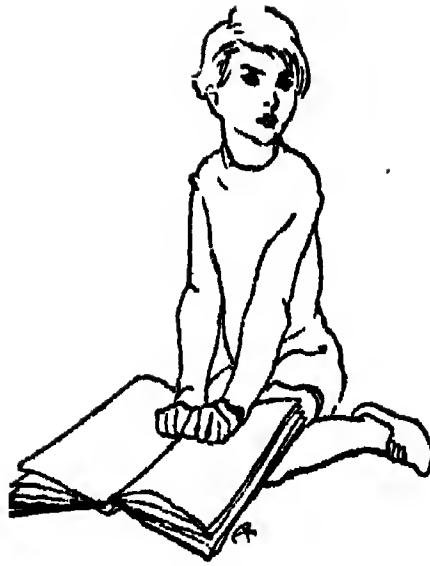
The world, what is it to you, dear,  
And me, if its face be grey,  
And the new-born year be a shrewd year  
For flowers that the fierce winds fray ?  
You smile, and the sky seems blue, dear ;  
You laugh, and the month turns May.

Love cares not for care, he has daffed her  
Aside as a mate for guile :  
The sight that my soul yearns after  
Feeds full my sense for awhile ;  
Your sweet little sun-faced laughter,  
Your good little glad grave smile.

Your hands through the bookshelves flutter ;  
Scott, Shakespeare, Dickens, are caught ;  
Blake's visions, that lighten and mutter ;  
Molière—and his smile has nought  
Left on it of sorrow, to utter  
The secret things of his thought.

No grim thing written or graven  
But grows, if you gaze on it, bright ;  
A lark's note rings from the raven,  
And tragedy's robe turns white ;  
And shipwrecks drift into haven ;  
And darkness laughs, and is light.

Grief seems but a vision of madness ;  
Life's key-note peals from above  
With nought in it more of sadness  
Than broods on the heart of a dove :  
At sight of you, thought grows gladness,  
And life, through love of you, love.



## Not a Child

i

“ NOT a child : I call myself a boy,”  
Says my king, with accent stern yet mild,  
Now nine years have brought him change of joy ;  
“ Not a child.”

How could reason be so far beguiled,  
Err so far from sense's safe employ,  
Stray so wide of truth, or run so wild ?

Seeing his face bent over book or toy,  
Child I called him, smiling : but he smiled  
Back, as one too high for vain annoy—  
Not a child.

Not a child ? alack the year !  
 What should ail an undefiled  
 Heart, that he would fain appear  
       Not a child ?

Men, with years and memories piled  
 Each on other, far and near,  
 Fain again would so be styled :

Fain would cast off hope and fear,  
 Rest, forget, be reconciled :  
 Why would you so fain be, dear, .  
       Not a child ?

Child or boy, my darling, which you will,  
 Still your praise finds heart and song employ,  
 Heart and song both yearning toward you still,  
       Child or boy.

All joys else might sooner pall or cloy  
 Love than this which inly takes its fill,  
 Dear, of sight of your more perfect joy.

Nay, be aught you please, let all fulfil  
 All your pleasure ; be your world your toy :  
 Mild or wild we love you, loud or still,  
       Child or boy.

*A flower of bliss, beyond all blessing Blest*







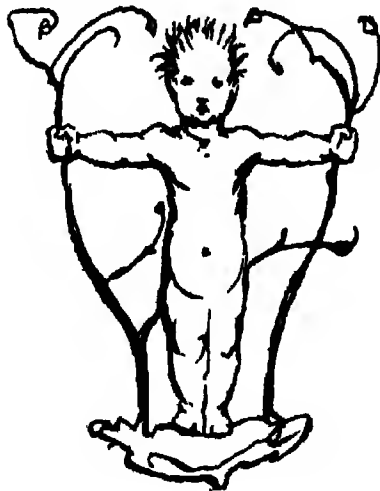


## Benediction

BLEST in death and life beyond man's guessing,  
Little children live and die, possess  
Still of grace that keeps them past expressing  
Blest.

Each least chirp that rings from every nest,  
Each least touch of flower-soft fingers pressing  
Aught that yearns and trembles to be prest,

Each least glance, gives gift of grace, redressing  
Grief's worst wrongs: each mother's nurturing breast  
Feeds a flower of bliss, beyond all blessing  
Blest.



## A Dark Month

*'La maison sans enfants !'*—VICTOR HUGO

A MONTH without sight of the sun  
Rising or reigning or setting  
Through days without use of the day,  
Who calls it the month of May ?  
The sense of the name is undone  
And the sound of it fit for forgetting.

We shall not feel if the sun rise,  
We shall not care when it sets :  
If a nightingale make night's air  
As noontide, why should we care ?  
Till a light of delight that is done rise,  
Extinguishing grey regrets ;

Till a child's face lighten again  
On the twilight of older faces ;  
Till a child's voice fall as the dew  
On furrows with heat parched through  
And all but hopeless of grain,  
Refreshing the desolate places—

Fall clear on the ears of us hearkening  
And hungering for food of the sound  
And thirsting for joy of his voice :  
Till the hearts in us hear and rejoice,  
And the thoughts of them doubting and darkening  
Rejoice with a glad thing found.

When the heart of our gladness is gone,  
What comfort is left with us after ?  
When the light of our eyes is away,  
What glory remains upon May,  
What blessing of song is thereon  
If we drink not the light of his laughter ?

No small sweet face with the daytime  
To welcome, warmer than noon !  
No sweet small voice as a bird's  
To bring us the day's first words !  
Mid May for us here is not Maytime :  
No summer begins with June.

A whole dead month in the dark,  
A dawn in the mists that o'ercome her  
Stifled and smothered and sad—  
Swift speed to it, barren and bad !  
And return to us, voice of the lark,  
And remain with us, sunlight of summer.

ii

Alas, what right has the dawn to glimmer,  
What right has the wind to do aught but moan ?  
All the day should be dimmer  
Because we are left alone.

Yestermorn like a sunbeam present  
Hither and thither a light step smiled,  
And made each place for us pleasant  
With the sense or the sight of a child.

But the leaves persist as before, and after  
Our parting the dull day still bears flowers .  
And songs less bright than his laughter  
Deride us from birds in the bowers.

Birds, and blossoms, and sunlight only,  
As though such folly sufficed for spring !  
As though the house were not lonely  
For want of the child its king !

lii

Asleep and afar to-night my darling  
Lies, and heeds not the night,  
If winds be stirring or storms be snarling ;  
For his sleep is its own sweet light.

I sit where he sat beside me quaffing  
The wine of story and song  
Poured forth of immortal cups, and laughing  
When mirth in the draught grew strong.

I broke the gold of the words, to melt it  
For hands but seven years old,  
And they caught the tale as a bird, and felt it  
More bright than visible gold.

And he drank down deep, with his eyes broad beaming,  
Here in this room where I am,  
The golden vintage of Shakespeare, gleaming  
In the silver vessels of Lamb.

Here by my hearth where he was I listen  
For the shade of the sound of a word,  
Athirst for the birdlike eyes to glisten,  
For the tongue to chirp like a bird.



At the blast of battle, how broad they brightened,  
Like fire in the spheres of stars,  
And clung to the pictured page, and lightened  
As keen as the heart of Mars !

At the touch of laughter, how swift it twittered  
The shrillest music on earth ;  
How the lithe limbs laughed and the whole child glittered  
With radiant riot of mirth !

Our Shakespeare now, as a man dumb-stricken,  
Stands silent there on the shelf :  
And my thoughts, that had song in the heart of them,  
And relish not Shakespeare's self. [sicken,

And my mood grows moodier than Hamlet's even,  
And man delights not me,  
But only the face that morn and even  
My heart leapt only to see.

That my heart made merry within me seeing,  
And sang as his laugh kept time :  
But song finds now no pleasure in being,  
And love no reason in rhyme.

iv

Mild May-blossom and proud sweet bay-flower,  
What, for shame, would you have with us here ?  
It is not the month of the May-flower  
This, but the fall of the year.

Flowers open only their lips in derision,  
Leaves are as fingers that point in scorn :  
The shows we see are a vision ;  
Spring is not verily born.

Yet boughs turn supple and buds grow sappy,  
As though the sun were indeed the sun :  
And all our woods are happy  
With all their birds save one.

But spring is over, but summer is over,  
But autumn is over, and winter stands  
With his feet sunk deep in the clover  
And cowslips cold in his hands.

His hoar grim head has a hawthorn bonnet,  
His gnarled gaunt hand has a gay green staff  
With new-blown rose-blossom on it :  
But his laugh is a dead man's laugh.

The laugh of spring that the heart seeks after,  
The hand that the whole world yearns to kiss,  
It rings not here in his laughter,  
The sign of it is not this.

There is not strength in it left to splinter  
Tall oaks, nor frost in his breath to sting :  
Yet it is but a breath as of winter,  
And it is not the hand of spring.



V

Thirty-one pale maidens, clad  
All in mourning dresses,  
Pass, with lips and eyes more sad  
That it seems they should be glad,  
Heads discrowned of crowns they had  
Grey for golden tresses.

Grey their girdles too for green,  
And their veils dishevelled :  
None would say, to see their mien,  
That the least of these had been  
Born no baser than a queen,  
Reared where flower-fays revelled.

Dreams that strive to seem awake,  
Ghosts that walk by daytime,  
Weary winds the way they take,  
Since, for one child's absent sake,  
May knows well, whate'er things make  
Sport, it is not Maytime.

vi

A hand at the door taps light  
As the hand of my heart's delight :  
    It is but a full-grown hand,  
Yet the stroke of it seems to start  
Hope like a bird in my heart,  
    Too feeble to soar or to stand.

To start light hope from her cover  
Is to raise but a kite for a plover  
    If her wings be not fledged to soar.  
Desire, but in dreams, cannot ope  
The door that was shut upon hope  
    When love went out at the door.

Well were it if vision could keep  
The lids of desire as in sleep  
    Fast locked, and over his eyes  
A dream with the dark soft key  
In her hand might hover, and be  
    Their keeper till morning rise ;

The morning that brings after many  
Days fled with no light upon any  
    The small face back which is gone ;  
When the loved little hands once more  
Shall struggle and strain at the door  
    They beat their summons upon.

If a soul for but seven days were cast out of heaven and  
its mirth,  
They would seem to her fears like as seventy years upon  
earth.

Even and morrow should seem to her sorrow as long  
As the passage of numberless ages in slumberless song.

Dawn, roused by the lark, would be surely as dark in  
her sight  
As her measureless measure of shadowless pleasure  
was bright.

Noon, gilt but with glory of gold, would be hoary and grey  
In her eyes that had gazed on the depths, unamazed  
with the day.

Night hardly would seem to make darker her dream  
 never done,  
 When it could but withhold what a man may behold  
 of the sun.

For dreams would perplex, were the days that should  
vex her but seven,  
The sight of her vision, made dark with division from  
heaven.

Till the light on my lonely way lighten that only now  
gleams,  
I too am divided from heaven and derided of dreams.

viii

A twilight fire-fly may suggest  
How flames the fire that feeds the sun :  
“ A crooked figure may attest  
In little space a million.”

But this faint-figured verse, that dresses  
With flowers the bones of one bare month,  
Of all it would say scarce expresses  
In crooked ways a millionth.

A fire-fly tenders to the father  
Of fires a tribute something worth :  
My verse, a shard-borne beetle rather,  
Drones over scarce-illuminated earth.

Some inches round me though it brighten  
With light of music-making thought,  
The dark indeed it may not lighten,  
The silence moves not, hearing nought.

Only my heart is eased with hearing,  
Only mine eyes are soothed with seeing,  
A face brought nigh, a footfall nearing,  
Till hopes take form and dreams have being.

## 18

As a poor man hungering stands with insatiate eyes and  
Void of bread [hands  
Right in sight of men that feast while his famine with  
Crumb is fed, [no least

Here across the garden-wall can I hear strange children  
Watch them play, [call,  
From the windowed seat above, whence the goodlier  
Is away. [child I love

Here the sights we saw together moved his fancy like  
To and fro, [a feather  
Now to wonder, and thereafter to the sunny storm of  
Loud and low— [laughter

Sights engraven on storied pages where man's tale of  
 All was told— [seven swift ages  
 Seen of eyes yet bright from heaven—for the lips that  
 Sweet years old. [laughed were seven



**X**

Why should May remember  
March, if March forget  
The days that began with December,  
The nights that a frost could fret ?

All their griefs are done with  
Now the bright months bless  
Fit souls to rejoice in the sun with,  
Fit heads for the wind's caress ;

Souls of children quickening  
With the whole world's mirth,  
Heads closelier than field-flowers thickening  
That crowd and illuminate earth,

Now that May's call musters  
Files of baby bands  
To marshal in joyfuller clusters  
Than the flowers that encumber their hands.

Yet morose November  
Found them no less gay,  
With nought to forget or remember  
Less bright than a branch of may.

.

*Now that May's call musters files of baby bands*







All the seasons moving  
Move their minds alike  
Applauding, acclaiming, approving  
All hours of the year that strike.

So my heart may fret not,  
Wondering if my friend  
Remember me not or forget not  
Or ever the month find end.

Not that love sows lighter  
Seed in children sown,  
But that life being lit in them brighter  
Moves fleeter than even our own.

May nor yet September  
Binds their hearts, that yet  
Remember, forget, and remember,  
Forget, and recall, and forget.

**xi**

As light on a lake's face moving  
Between a cloud and a cloud  
Till night reclaim it, reproving  
The heart that exults too loud,

The heart that watching rejoices  
When soft it swims into sight  
Applauded of all the voices  
And stars of the windy night,

So brief and unsure, but sweeter .  
Than ever a moondawn smiled,  
Moves, measured of no tune's metre,  
The song in the soul of a child ;

The song that the sweet soul singing  
Half listens, and hardly hears,  
Though sweeter than joy-bells ringing  
And brighter than joy's own tears ;

The song that remembrance of pleasure  
Begins, and forgetfulness ends  
With a soft swift change in the measure  
That rings in remembrance of friends

As the moon on the lake's face flashes,  
So haply may gleam at whiles  
A dream through the dear deep lashes  
Whereunder a child's eye smiles,

And the least of us all that love him  
May take for a moment part  
With angels around and above him,  
And I find place in his heart.



xii

Child, were you kinless and lonely—  
Dear, were you kin to me—  
My love were compassionate only  
Or such as it needs would be.

But eyes of father and mother  
Like sunlight shed on you shine :  
What need you have heed of another  
Such new strange love as is mine ?

It is not meet if unruly  
Hands take of the children's bread  
And cast it to dogs ; but truly  
The dogs after all would be fed.

On crumbs from the children's table  
That crumble, dropped from above,  
My heart feeds, fed with unstable  
Loose waifs of a child's light love.

Though love in your heart were brittle  
As glass that breaks with a touch,  
You haply would lend him a little  
Who surely would give you much.

Here is a rough  
 Rude sketch of my friend,  
 Faint-coloured enough  
 And unworthily penned.

Fearlessly fair  
 And triumphant he stands,  
 And holds unaware  
 Friends' hearts in his hands ;

Stalwart and straight  
 As an oak that should bring  
 Forth gallant and great  
 Fresh roses in spring.

On the paths of his pleasure  
 All graces that wait  
 What metre shall measure  
 What rhyme shall relate

Each action, each motion,  
 Each feature, each limb,  
 Demands a devotion  
 In honour of him :

Head that the hand  
 Of a god might have blest,  
 Laid lustrous and bland  
 On the curve of its crest :

Mouth sweeter than cherries  
Keen eyes as of Mars  
Browner than berries  
And brighter than stars.

Nor colour nor wordy  
Weak song can declare  
The stature how sturdy,  
How stalwart his air.

As a king in his bright  
Presence-chamber may be,  
So seems he in height—  
Twice higher than your knee.

As a warrior sedate  
With reserve of his power,  
So seems he in state—  
As tall as a flower :

As a rose overtowering  
The ranks of the rest  
That beneath it lie cowering,  
Less bright than their best

And his hands are as sunny  
As ruddy ripe corn  
Or the browner-hued honey  
From heather-bells borne.

When summer sits proudest,  
Fulfilled with its mirth,  
And rapture is loudest  
In air and on earth,

The suns of all hours  
That have ripened the roots  
Bring forth not such flowers  
And beget not such fruits.

And well though I know it,  
As fain would I write,  
Child, never a poet  
Could praise you aright.

I bless you ? the blessing  
Were less than a jest  
Too poor for expressing ;  
I come to be blest,

With humble and dutiful  
Heart, from above :  
Bless me, O my beautiful  
Innocent love !

This rhyme in your praise  
With a smile was begun ;  
But the goal of his ways  
Is uncovered to none,

Nor pervious till after  
The limit impend ;  
It is not in laughter  
These rhymes of you end.



xiv

Spring, and fall, and summer, and winter,  
Which may Earth love least of them all,  
Whose arms embrace as their signs imprint her,  
Summer, or winter, or spring, or fall ?

The clear-eyed spring with the wood-birds mating,  
The rose-red summer with eyes aglow,  
The yellow fall with serene eyes waiting,  
The wild-eyed winter with hair all snow ?

Spring's eyes are soft, but if frosts benumb her  
As winter's own will her shrewd breath sting :  
Storms may rend the raiment of summer,  
And fall grow bitter as harsh-lipped spring.

One sign for summer and winter guides me,  
One for spring, and the like for fall :  
Whichever from sight of my friend divides me,  
That is the worst ill season of all.

**XV**

Worse than winter is spring  
If I come not to sight of my king :  
But then what a spring will it be  
When my king takes homage of me !

I send his grace from afar  
Homage, as though to a star ;  
As a shepherd whose flock takes flight  
May worship a star by night.

As a flock that a wolf is upon  
My songs take flight and are gone :  
No heart is in any to sing  
Aught but the praise of my king.

Fain would I once and again  
Sing deeds and passions of men :  
But ever a child's head gleams  
Between my work and my dreams.

Between my hand and my eyes  
The lines of a small face rise,  
And the lines I trace and retrace  
Are none but those of the face.

xvi

Till the tale of all this flock of days alike  
All be done,  
Weary days of waiting till the month's hand strike,  
Thirty-one,  
Till the clock's hand of the month break off, and end  
With the clock,  
Till the last and whitest sheep at last be penned  
Of the flock,  
I their shepherd keep the count of night and day  
With my song,  
Though my song be, like this month which once was May,  
All too long.

xvii

The incarnate sun, a tall strong youth,  
On old Greek eyes in sculpture smiled :  
But trulier had it given the truth  
To shape him like a child.

No face full-grown of all our dearest  
So lightens all our darkness, none  
Most loved of all our hearts hold nearest  
So far outshines the sun,

As when with sly shy smiles that feign  
Doubt if the hour be clear, the time  
Fit to break off my work again  
Or sport of prose or rhyme,

My friend peers in on me with merry  
Wise face, and though the sky stay dim  
The very light of day, the very  
Sun's self comes in with him.



xviii

Out of sight,  
Out of mind !  
Could the light  
Prove unkind ?

Can the sun  
Quite forget  
What was done  
Ere he set ?

Does the moon  
When she wanes  
Leave no tune  
That remains

In the void  
Shell of night  
Overcloyed  
With her light ?

Must the shore  
At low tide  
Feel no more  
Hope or pride,

No intense  
Joy to be,  
In the sense  
Of the sea—

In the pulses  
Of her shocks  
It repulses,  
When its rocks

Thrill and ring  
As with glee ?  
Has my king  
Cast off me,

Whom no bird  
Flying south  
Brings one word  
From his mouth ?

Not the ghost  
Of a word  
Riding post  
Have I heard,

Since the day  
When my king  
Took away  
With him spring,

And the cup  
Of each flower  
Shrivelled up  
That same hour,

With no light  
Left behind.  
Out of sight,  
Out of mind !

xix

Because I adore you  
And fall  
On the knees of my spirit before you—  
After all,

You need not insult,  
My king,  
With neglect, though your spirit exult  
In the spring,

Even me, though not worth,  
God knows,  
One word of you sent me in mirth,  
Or one rose

Out of all in your garden  
That grow  
Where the frost and the wind never harden  
Flakes of snow,

Nor ever is rain  
At all,  
But the roses rejoice to remain  
Fair and tall—

The roses of love,  
More sweet  
Than blossoms that rain from above  
Round our feet,

When under high bowers  
We pass,  
Where the west wind freckles with flowers  
All the grass.

But a child's thoughts bear  
More bright  
Sweet visions by day, and more fair  
Dreams by night,

Than summer's whole treasure  
Can be :  
What am I that his thought should take pleasure,  
Then, in me ?

I am only my love's  
True lover,  
With a nestful of songs, like doves  
Under cover,

That I bring in my cap  
Fresh caught,  
To be laid on my small king's lap—  
Worth just nought.

Yet it haply may hap  
That he,  
When the mirth in his veins is as sap  
In a tree,

Will remember me too  
Some day  
Ere the transit be thoroughly through  
Of this May—

Or perchance, if such grace  
May be,  
Some night when I dream of his face,  
Dream of me.

Or if this be too high  
A hope  
For me to prefigure in my  
Horoscope.

He may dream of the place  
Where we  
Basked once in the light of his face,  
Who now see

Nought brighter, not one  
Thing bright,  
Than the stars and the moon and the sun,  
Day nor night.

XX

Day by darkling day,  
Overpassing, bears away  
Somewhat of the burden of this weary May.

Night by numbered night,  
Waning, brings more near in sight  
Hope that grows to vision of my heart's delight.

Nearer seems to burn  
In the dawn's rekindling urn  
Flame of fragrant incense, hailing his return.

Louder seems each bird  
In the brightening branches heard  
Still to speak some ever more delightful word.

All the mists that swim  
Round the dawns that grow less dim  
Still wax brighter and more bright with hope of him.

All the suns that rise  
Bring that day more near our eyes  
When the sight of him shall clear our clouded skies.

All the winds that roam  
Fruitful fields or fruitless foam  
Blow the bright hour near that brings his bright face home.

xx1

I hear of two far hence  
In a garden met,  
And the fragrance blown from thence  
Fades not yet.

The one is seven years old,  
And my friend is he :  
But the years of the other have told  
Eighty-three.

To hear these twain converse  
Or to see them greet  
Were sweeter than softest verse  
May be sweet.

The hoar old gardener there  
With an eye more mild  
Perchance than his mild white hair  
Meets the child.

I had rather hear the words  
That the twain exchange  
Than the songs of all the birds  
There that range,

Call, chirp, and twitter there  
Through the garden-beds  
Where the sun alike sees fair  
Those two heads,

And which may holier be  
Held in heaven of those  
Or more worth heart's thanks to see  
No man knows.

xxii

Of such is the kingdom of heaven.  
No glory that ever was shed  
From the crowning star of the seven  
That crown the north world's head,

No word that ever was spoken  
Of human or godlike tongue,  
Gave ever such godlike token  
Since human harps were strung.

No sign that ever was given  
To faithful or faithless eyes  
Showed ever beyond clouds riven  
So clear a Paradise.

Earth's creeds may be seventy times seven  
And blood have defiled each creed :  
If of such be the kingdom of heaven,  
It must be heaven indeed.





xxiii

The wind on the downs is bright  
As though from the sea :  
And morning and night  
Take comfort again with me.

He is nearer to-day,  
Each night to each morning saith,  
Whose return shall revive dead May  
With the balm of his breath.

The sunset says to the moon,  
He is nearer to-night  
Whose coming in June  
Is looked for more than the light.

Bird answers to bird,  
Hour passes the sign on to hour,  
And for joy of the bright news heard  
Flower murmurs to flower.

The ways that were glad of his feet  
In the woods that he knew  
Grow softer to meet  
The sense of his footfall anew.

He is near now as day,  
Says hope to the new-born light :  
He is near now as June is to May,  
Says love to the night.

xxiv

Good things I keep to console me  
For lack of the best of all,  
A child to command and control me,  
Bid come and remain at his call.

Sun, wind, and woodland and highland,  
Give all that ever they gave :  
But my world is a cultureless island,  
My spirit a masterless slave.

And friends are about me, and better  
At summons of no man stand :  
But I pine for the touch of a fetter,  
The curb of a strong king's hand.

Each hour of the day in her season  
Is mine to be served as I will :  
And for no more exquisite reason  
Are all served idly and ill.

By slavery my sense is corrupted,  
My soul not fit to be free :  
I would fain be controlled, interrupted,  
Compelled as a thrall may be.

For fault of spur and of bridle  
I tire of my stall to death :  
My sail flaps joyless and idle  
For want of a small child's breath.

XXV

Whiter and whiter  
The dark lines grow,  
And broader opens and brighter  
The sense of the text below.

Nightfall and morrow  
Bring nigher the boy  
Whom wanting we want not sorrow,  
Whom having we want no joy.

Clearer and clearer  
The sweet sense grows  
Of the word which hath summer for hearer,  
The word on the lips of the rose.

Duskily dwindles  
Each deathlike day,  
Till June rearing rekindles  
The depth of the darkness of May.

*The Path of Spring*







xxvi

*"In his bright radiance and collateral light  
Must I be comforted, not in his sphere."*

Stars in heaven are many,  
Suns in heaven but one :  
Nor for man may any  
Star supplant the sun.

Many a child as joyous  
As our far-off king  
Meets as though to annoy us  
In the paths of spring.

Sure as spring gives warning,  
All things dance in tune :  
Sun on Easter morning,  
Cloud and windy moon,

Stars between the tossing  
Boughs of tuneful trees,  
Sails of ships recrossing  
Leagues of dancing seas ;

Best, in all this playtime,  
Best of all in tune,  
Girls more glad than Maytime,  
Boys more bright than June ;



Mixed with all those dances,  
Far through field and street  
Sing their silent glances,  
Ring their radiant feet.

Flowers wherewith May crowned us  
Fall ere June be crowned :  
Children blossom round us  
All the whole year round.

Is the garland worthless  
For one rose the less,  
And the feast made mirthless ?  
Love, at least, says yes.

Strange it were, with many  
Stars enkindling air,  
Should but one find any  
Welcome : strange it were,

Had one star alone won  
Praise for light from far :  
Nay, love needs his own one  
Bright particular star.

Hope and recollection  
Only lead him right  
In its bright reflection  
And collateral light.

Find as yet we may not  
Comfort in its sphere :  
Yet these days will weigh not  
When it warms us here ;

When full-orbed it rises,  
Now divined afar :  
None in all the skies is  
Half so good a star ;

None that seers importune  
Till a sign be won :  
Star of our good fortune,  
Rise and reign, our sun !

xxvii

I pass by the small room now forlorn  
Where once each night as I passed I knew  
A child's bright sleep from even to morn  
Made sweet the whole night through.

As a soundless shell, as a songless nest,  
Seems now the room that was radiant then  
And fragrant with his happier rest  
Than that of slumbering men.

The day therein is less than the day,  
The night is indeed night now therein :  
Heavier the dark seems there to weigh,  
And slower the dawns begin.

As a nest fulfilled with birds, as a shell  
Fulfilled with breath of a god's own hymn,  
Again shall be this bare blank cell,  
Made sweet again with him.

xxviii

Spring darkens before us,  
A flame going down,  
With chant from the chorus  
Of days without crown—  
Cloud, rain, and sonorous  
Soft wind on the down.

She is wearier not of us  
Than we of the dream  
That spring was to love us  
And joy was to gleam  
Through the shadows above us  
That shift as they stream.

Half dark and half hoary,  
Float far on the loud  
Mild wind, as a glory  
Half pale and half proud  
From the twilight of story,  
Her tresses of cloud ;

Like phantoms that glimmer  
Of glories of old  
With ever yet dimmer  
Pale circlets of gold  
As darkness grows grimmer  
And memory more cold.

Like hope growing clearer  
With wane of the moon,  
Shines toward us the nearer  
Gold frontlet of June,  
And a face with it dearer  
Than midsummer noon.





## xxix

You send me your love in a letter,  
I send you my love in a song :  
Ah child, your gift is the better,  
Mine does you but wrong.

No fame, were the best less brittle,  
No praise, were it wide as earth,  
Is worth so much as a little  
Child's love may be worth.

We see the children above us  
As they might angels above :  
Come back to us, child, if you love us,  
And bring us your love.

**XXX**

No time for books or for letters :  
What time should there be ?  
No room for tasks and their fetters :  
Full room to be free.

The wind and the sun and the Maytime  
Had never a guest  
More worthy the most that his playtime  
Could give of its best.

If rain should come on, peradventure,  
(But sunshine forbid !)  
Vain hope in us haply might venture  
To dream as it did.

But never may come, of all comers  
Least welcome, the rain,  
To mix with his servant the summer's  
Rose-garlanded train !

He would write, but his hours are as busy  
As bees in the sun,  
And the jubilant whirl of their dizzy  
Dance never is done.

The message is more than a letter,  
Let love understand,  
And the thought of his joys even better  
Than sight of his hand.

*Summer's rose-garlanded train*









xxx

Wind, high-souled, full-hearted  
 South-west wind of the spring,  
 Ere April and earth had parted,  
 Skies, bright with thy forward wing,  
 Grew dark in an hour with the shadow behind it, that  
 bade not a bird dare sing.

Wind whose feet are sunny,  
 Wind whose wings are cloud,  
 With lips more sweet than honey  
 Still, speak they low or loud,  
 Rejoice now again in the strength of thine heart: let  
 the depth of thy soul wax proud.

We hear thee singing or sighing,  
 Just not given to sight,  
 All but visible thy wing  
 Between the clouds and the light,  
 And the light in our hearts is enkindled, the shadow  
 therein of the clouds put to flight.

From the gift of thine hands we gather  
 The core of the flowers therein,  
 Keen glad heart of heather,  
 Hot sweet heart of whin,  
 Twin breaths in thy godlike breath close blended of  
 wild spring's wildest of kin.

For the house that was childless awhile, and the light  
of it darkened, the pulse of it dwindled,  
Rings radiant again with a child's bright feet, with the  
light of his face is rekindled.  
And the ways of the meadows that knew him, the sweep  
of the down that the sky's belt closes,  
Grow gladder at heart than the soft wind made them  
whose feet were but fragrant with roses,  
Though the fall of the year be upon us, who trusted  
in June and by June were defrauded,  
And the summer that brought us not back the desire  
of our eyes be gone hence unapplauded.  
For July came joyless among us, and August went out  
from us arid and sterile,  
And the hope of our hearts, as it seemed, was no more  
than a flower that the seasons imperil,  
And the joy of our hearts, as it seemed, than a thought  
which regret had not heart to remember,  
Till four dark months overpast were atoned for, and  
summer began in September.  
Hark, April again as a bird in the house with a child's  
voice hither and thither :  
See, May in the garden again with a child's face cheering  
the woods ere they wither.  
June laughs in the light of his eyes, and July on the  
sunbright cheeks of him slumbers,  
And August glows in a smile more sweet than the cadence  
of gold-mouthed numbers.  
In the morning the sight of him brightens the sun, and  
the noon with delight in him flushes,  
And the silence of nightfall in music about him as soft  
as the sleep that it hushes,  
We awake with a sense of a sunrise that is not a gift of  
the sundawn's giving,  
And a voice that salutes us is sweeter than all sounds  
else in the world of the living,

And a presence that warms us is brighter than all in  
the world of our visions beholden,  
Though the dreams of our sleep were as those that the  
light of a world without grief makes golden.  
For the best that the best of us ever devised as a likeness  
of heaven and its glory,  
What was it of old, or what is it and will be for ever,  
in song or in story,  
Or in shape or in colour of carven or painted resemblance,  
adored of all ages,  
But a vision recorded of children alive in the pictures  
of old or the pages ?  
Where children are not, heaven is not, and heaven if  
they come not again shall be never :  
But the face and the voice of a child are assurance of  
heaven and its promise for ever.



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